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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0693
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4230
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7784
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5344
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1208
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1128
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001105

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMESE REGIME DESTROYS EDUCATION TO KEEP CONTROL

RANGOON 00001105 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Political Officer Chelsia Wheeler for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Myat Ko Ko, a member of the Embassy-funded Cosmopolitan Library Club, explained how the regime consolidates its power by destroying Burma's education system. While the children of the generals can afford to attend foreign universities, over 300,000 university students in Burma must make do with sub-par local schools. Small-scale libraries throughout the country, many relying on support from the Embassy's American Center, provide the sole source for books on political science and literature in a country where even possessing a copy of Aung San Suu Kyi's "Freedom From Fear" can result in a 10 to 20 year prison sentence. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On November 9 Poloff met with Myat Ko Ko, a founding member of the Cosmopolitan Library Club. The club hosts an Embassy-funded English language program in its library, which contains books on literature, philosophy, and political science. Members can also borrow books on human rights and democracy that the regime considers illegal. These books are not displayed openly but kept behind the counter. Cosmopolitan Library Club received funding under the Embassy's small grants program to enable university students to read English-language material to which they would not otherwise have access.

¶3. (C) Myat Ko Ko pointed out that his organization exists primarily because of the poor quality of university education in Burma. After the 1988 demonstrations, the government closed down the country's four largest universities and created many remote, small campuses throughout the country, based on the idea that such a system would make it more difficult for students to organize in the future. Myat Ko Ko explained that university majors do not reflect a student's interests, but rather on the outcome of their Tenth Standard Exams. High scores earn students a chance to receive a poor-quality medical education; lower scores limit students to studying subjects with less employment potential, such as history and natural sciences. He noted that local school officials often inflate Tenth Standard Exam scores to improve

their own school's image, and many students with high scores are not adequately prepared, even for poor quality Burmese universities.

¶4. (C) The problems in the education system are no accident, asserted Myat Ko Ko. University students organized and led the 1988 demonstrations, after which the government dispersed the entire student population to prevent future uprisings. Several subsequent demonstrations have also originated on university campuses, although on a much smaller scale since ¶1988. The generals, well aware of the poor quality of education in Burma, send their own children to expensive universities abroad, as does anyone else in Burma who can afford to do so.

¶5. (C) As a result of the government's systematic destruction of the university system, Myat Ko Ko does not believe that students now are as organized for a democracy movement as they were in 1988. Communication among students is more dangerous and difficult, and there are more informants among the students than previously. However, at the moment, Myat Ko Ko observed, students and the general public have a significant interest in political developments in Burma. Students, despite being unorganized, present the best hope for the democracy movement, he said, adding that the best way to educate them is through small libraries, such as the Cosmopolitan Library.

¶6. (C) Comment: While the Than Shwe regime touts "human resource development" and "education" as the top goals in their mouthpiece daily, the New Light of Myanmar, they have simultaneously allowed Burma's education system, once esteemed as the best in Southeast Asia, to wither and die. As a result, Burma has far fewer trained and well-educated people to lead it into the future than it did sixty years ago at independence. This will make a political and economic

RANGOON 00001105 002.2 OF 002

transition all the more difficult. Until Burma has a government willing to invest in future generations, Burma will remain at the bottom of the world's development and poverty indices. End Comment.
VILLAROSA